

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 March 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Report to the Board of the Working Group
on Soviet Military Estimates

1. In two meetings and a number of informal discussions, the designated group has considered problems and possibilities in connection with revising the form, approach and content of the Soviet military estimates. We have done so in the light of the DCI's expressed desire to improve the readability of these documents, the ideas and suggestions in the Secretary of State's letter of 9 January, the views of Mr. Kissinger and the White House staff, and our own varying degrees of conviction that it is time to effect some changes.

2. The following report offers some general observations on the problem and a number of fairly specific recommendations. We plan a discussion with the Board in the next few days, after which preparatory drafting of terms of reference, illustrative

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outlines or sample drafts, etc., will promptly be undertaken. And after we have made up our minds in this office and have samples in hand, but before anything gets set in concrete, we should seek the Director's reactions to the proposals.

3. General Observations. No one doubts that there is room for improvement -- certainly in the packaging and presentation, and probably to some extent in terms of making the content more useful to particular consumers. To some extent, at least, by trying to satisfy several different levels of consumer with different kinds of interests and needs, we have been falling between stools. The standard estimates are too long, too technical and too specialized for high-level policy-makers; and they are of insufficient technical depth for military planners. And for both types of consumers, it would clearly be useful to provide, one way or another, better insights into how the community reaches the judgments it does in terms of the nature of the evidence, degrees of confidence in it, the lines of argument and analysis behind the conclusions, alternative hypotheses or possibilities, and the like.

4. At the same time, most of us doubt the need or desirability of really radical revisions in the present system. Comments from the Secretary of State and the White House staff express or imply no wish to abandon the present system in favor of something

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drastically different. And from the point of view of ourselves and the rest of the intelligence community, there are certain real, if unexciting, reasons for retaining much of what has been evolved through years of practical experience. The main recommendations below are made with this in mind. We list the proposals in three categories: (a) those which all or most of us consider imperative or at least highly desirable; (b) those which most of us believe worthwhile even if not essential; and (c) a few farther out ideas which appeal to one or another of us, which have been discussed by the group, and are at least worth consideration in the Office as a whole.

5 Recommendations

A. Essential and/or Highly Desirable.

(1) A new kind of estimate should be added to the series, along the lines suggested by Secretary Rogers, designed for top level readers. It should not be an analytical-descriptive summary of the main military NIE's, but rather an overview assessment of Soviet strategic policy and capabilities and their relation to the US. The ONE Memorandum (Soviet Strategic Weapons Programs, 11 February) is one possible model. It should

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be topical and selective, concentrating each year on the big, live issues then current -- which hopefully will dictate and permit wide annual variations and freshness of approach. Routinization would kill it. It should be published after the main body of estimates, but consideration of what subjects it emphasizes and what it says about them should be a continuing process throughout the year, at least within this Office. A sample outline should be prepared soon for internal consideration.

(2) The principal customary estimates (NIE 11-8, NIE 11-3, and NIE 11-14) should continue to be published as separate documents on about the same schedule as before. The important ASW problem should clearly be treated in NIE 11-3. (A possible additional breakdown into four packages is suggested in B below).

(3) Whether packaged in three or four documents, this series can and should be made more informative by additional attention to historical perspective in the text; by some expansion of the discussion of economic aspects of the forces, and of strategy and doctrine, it being understood that there would not be analyses in depth (the latter require

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separate studies). Freer use of annexes to expand technical discussion on selected subjects of particular importance that year would also help the informative quality and keep details out of the text. Decisions as to which questions deserve such treatment should be made when terms of reference are agreed, and material for such annexes requested of the appropriate contributors. Where important uncertainties arise concerning the quality of the evidence, or where alternative hypotheses are called for, these should be more fully explored in Annexes.

(4) A major effort should be made, beginning now, to incorporate extensive graphics and other cosmetic and design innovations in all these estimates, including the proposed VIP one. This implies and, we believe requires, the full-time services of a first-class graphics specialist for at least the rest of this year. Planning, preparation and coordination of these matters requires a particular cast of talent and expertise not now present in the Office. It cannot effectively be done by staff members responsible for the written text, and the man

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in charge has got to follow the estimates through the process pretty continuously. Ideally, ONE could probably employ such a specialist year around, with half of his time going to other Office publications. If this is not feasible, the minimum step is to get one on loan for the rest of this year -- and that soon. His first task would be to acquaint himself with the 11 series, with other publications such as those of OSR, and to come up with proposals for graphics. Among other things in their favor, the imaginative use of graphics may eliminate the need for some conventional prose.

B. Matters of Second Priority but favored by most of us.

(1) The question of NIE 11-4. At least for the present, we should decide not to decide on whether 11-4 type estimate is needed. It may be that the VIP estimate, plus the revised treatment in the main series, will eliminate the need or usefulness for such. But we will not know until these are well along -- say in the fourth quarter.

(2) Steps to rationalize the review process. With the growing technical complexity of the questions, it

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becomes increasingly difficult, inherently, to discuss them in simple English prose -- even with graphics. Yet we are required to do so. Expertise in the subject matter is not always consistent with high editorial skill and vice-versa. The present system, in which review by the Board tries to combine more or less sophisticated technical discussion with more or less cosmetic editorial attention, is fully satisfactory in neither respect and to neither Board or Staff. A small working session prior to publication of the draft for Board review, and devoted entirely to perfecting text editorially, is indicated. Participants to be drawn from Board and Staff as appropriate.

(3) Breaking the main series into four packages. A good case can be made for parceling out the 11-3, 11-8 and 11-14 matter in four packages. A description of this approach, which the SMT Staff favors, appears as Annex A. It has the merits of internal logic and cogency on each paper, plus bureaucratic managability. It carries the price of forcing innovation over inertia for reason not too compelling. Most of us would vote for trying it.

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C. Farther Out Possibilities. The group has discussed several propositions which could be called more or less radical reform. None of them "grabbed" the majority of us, but they deserve general attention. I leave it to individual proponents to make the case for each, orally or in writing as they wish. Briefly, these possibilities include.

(1) Combining 11-8 and 11-3 in one overall Soviet strategic paper. (Probably too cumbersome for producers and consumers alike.)

(2) Fragmenting the whole main series into a number of force packages, evenly spaced around the year. (Already proposed and found wanting.)

(3) A combination of the loose-leaf approach for keeping current on facts about the forces and an ad hoc approach to major estimative questions -- i.e., dropping the routine cycle and publishing full-dress NIE's on selected problems as appropriate.

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6. Negative Recommendations. Certain ideas have been advanced which most of us believe ought to be resisted:

(a) One is the proposition of supplying statements of projected US force plans along with the estimates. We would like to avoid this for a number of reasons, among them being the fact that the intelligence community is not the place to go for this information; it clearly must avoid taking even implied responsibility for approving particular proposals even though it would seem to do so if it took responsibility for providing this service; and the implied relationship between a given projection of US force goals, on the one hand, and Soviet projections on the other, would get us into an endless amount of circular argumentation and even net evaluation which we could do only at the cost of objective intelligence. (This is not to argue against estimative emphasis on the importance of interaction in the Soviet-US arms relationship; only against war-gaming it in precise terms.)

(b) A second negative recommendation pertains to the idea of citing technical studies by other agencies or contractors in NIE's. If appropriate, these ought to be grist for our mill and freely exploited; but to open up this floodgate by citation in footnotes would introduce a number of

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evils -- including the implied right of anybody in USIB to insert favorable mention of any document he wants.

(c) A third negative recommendation is against the idea of terminating the effort to estimate beyond the next 2-3 years, contenting ourselves with presentation of the known facts and their obvious mid-term implications. This would not be very responsible, and guaranteed to make the estimates less relevant to real problems).

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ANNEX A

1. One approach to a realignment or reorganizing of the military estimates which in our opinion merits some consideration goes as follows:

a. Publish an estimate in the early fall which concerns itself only with Soviet forces for intercontinental attack (ICBMs, nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines, heavy bombers, etc.). It would be called NIE 11-8, Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack.

b. Publish an estimate along the lines of NIE 11-3 at present, but including also a discussion of Soviet ASW capabilities. This would be titled "Soviet Strategic Defense Forces", and would be issued about as now scheduled.

c. Late in the year publish an estimate which would be titled NIE 11-14, "Soviet Forces for Attack in Eurasia". This one would contain the present 11-14 material less the parts of the naval section that do not deal with support of Eurasian

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operations. It would include also the strategic forces available for peripheral attack (i.e. MR/IRBMs, diesel powered ballistic missile submarines, medium bombers, etc.), which now are discussed in NIE 11-8.

d. Issue an estimate which concerned itself with Soviet capabilities to project power in distant areas. It would include treatment of the naval forces (less missile submarines and ASW forces). This estimate would also include airlift and sealift, the distant limited military capability problem, military aid and bases, etc. It would be issued early in the year.

2. The advantages of the above are, in our view, manifold. This approach would give each of the Soviet military estimates greater unity, coherence, emphasis, and balance than they now possess.

a. The primary advantage is that each estimate would focus upon a discrete problem, and keep the picture clear of the clutter that now creeps in. This is most important with regard to Soviet intercontinental attack forces. These forces do not really pose the same problem to us as do the Soviet peripheral attack forces. And the peripheral attack forces

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have basically the mission of supporting Soviet capabilities in Eurasia. (The Scaleboard situation is a case in point.) In addition, one of the principal means of defense against the US Polaris fleet is ASW, discussion of which properly belongs in NIE 11-3. Finally, Soviet theater and naval forces do not pose a problem of sufficient similarity to warrant treatment in a single estimate.

b. The most important estimate, in the eyes of the present administration, is the Soviet intercontinental attack estimate. Issuing it as a separate paper would permit adequate treatment of the critical controversial judgments, without its getting so long as to put people off.

c. The timing and sequence of the estimates per this proposal would allow us to attack the most urgent problems (intercontinental attack and strategic defense) sufficiently early to meet Pentagon planning deadlines. The later estimates would be compatible in timing and content with MC 161 time schedules.

d. Finally, we would expect the coordination process to be no more difficult than at present and probably considerably

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easier. Some of the contentious issues now arise because of the proximity of some unrelated issues in the estimates as presently constituted.

3. Any balanced presentation of a thought or concept should reflect both advantage and disadvantages (if any). We can't think of any disadvantages. The only difficulty we foresee is in getting people out of a habit they have become used to over the past seven years.

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